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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 HANOI 000889

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VM

SUBJECT: Ambassador, VFM Minh Discuss Human Rights, Nuclear MOU, Burma, and Iran

REF: HANOI 1084, HANOI 827, HANOI 873, HANOI 861 AND 859

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CLASSIFIED BY: Virginia Palmer, Charge D'Affaires; REASON: 1.4(B), (D)

[¶1.](#) (U) This cable contains an action request. Please see paragraph eight.

[¶2.](#) (C) SUMMARY: On October 30, the Ambassador met with Vice Foreign Minister Pham Binh Minh to reiterate U.S. concerns about the conviction of political dissidents and the forced expulsion of Lang Mai followers from the Bat Nha Pagoda, highlighting the November Human Rights Dialogue as an opportunity to make concrete progress. The Ambassador also stressed the need to work together on tough international issues such as Iran and Burma, and pressed Vietnam to finalize preparations for the signing of a civilian nuclear MOU. VFM Minh said that Vietnam recognized that Bat Nha had become a sensitive, high-profile issue and had appointed a Deputy Prime Minister to coordinate the government's response. Minh expressed relief that any likely action on Iran at the UN Security Council would come after Vietnam completed its October Presidency, but acknowledged that reports that Tehran had moved away from the agreements it made in Vienna appeared troublesome. Minh declined to offer specifics on the recent visit to Vietnam of Burma's third-ranking military official, though he insisted that Rangoon was displaying signs of increased flexibility. Relaxed throughout, Minh only brought up one issue: a visa case involving his former boss, retired MFA official Pham Ngac (see action request in paragraph seven). END SUMMARY.

Human Rights and Religious Freedom

[¶3.](#) (SBU) Over lunch at his residence October 30, the Ambassador urged Vice Foreign Minister Pham Binh Minh to take advantage of the upcoming Human Rights Dialogue to make concrete progress. The Ambassador noted in particular our desire to move forward with governance projects, including cooperative efforts at the National Assembly and in the rule of law. Turning to specific cases, the Ambassador emphasized that the recent convictions of political dissidents (ref A), a controversial Prime Ministerial decree ("Decision 97") limiting the ability of independent research

institutions to criticize the government/Party (ref B), and violence associated with the forced removal of monks and nuns associated with the Lang Mai ("Plum Village") Order from the Bat Nha Pagoda (ref. C) had made it much more difficult to argue that Vietnam was making progress. The Ambassador passed Minh a copy of an op-ed written a prominent U.S. adherent of Thich Nhat Hanh that appeared in the October 29 Asian Wall Street Journal, highlighting in particular a) the need to ensure that there was no more violence, and b) the recommendation that the GVN put out a public statement underscoring that the Plum Village followers enjoy freedom of worship.

¶4. (C) VFM Minh repeated the GVN's standard line that the Bat Nha dispute was an "intra-Buddhist" conflict; however, he assured the Ambassador that the GVN recognized the seriousness of the issue, and had designated DPM (and Politburo Member) Truong Vinh Trong to take the lead in coordinating the government's approach to the Lang Mai/Bat Nha issue. Minh suggested that the Department reach out to DPM Trong on the issue when he travels to the United States November 5-13. (Note: DPM Trong will be in Washington November 9 for meetings connected with his HHS-funded visit to investigate methadone treatment practices. End note.) Minh agreed that the Human Rights Dialogue offered useful opportunities to exchange views, and noted that he had instructed the MFA to provide, through its embassy in Washington, a complete accounting of the 69 cases raised in a recent joint letter from Congress. On Decision 97, Minh said the matter was "complicated" and "misunderstood" and that the Minister of Science and Technology would be briefing interested ambassadors November 6.

Civilian-Nuclear MOU

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¶5. (SBU) The Ambassador pressed VFM Minh to work with the Ministry of Science and Technology to push for a prompt clearance of the Media Note on Civil Nuclear Power and Nuclear Security, in order to be able to sign the already agreed-upon MOU on the margins of the APEC meeting in Singapore. (He also passed Minh a letter to DPM/FM Pham Gia Khiem making the same points.) Minh agreed that the nuclear MOU was an extremely worthwhile initiative and promised to pursue the matter. At the same time, he cautioned that it might take some time for Vietnam's interagency process to clear the language in the Media Note; if the signing couldn't take place at APEC, it certainly could at the ASEAN ministerial in July. The Ambassador pushed back, noting that July was too long to wait for something that had already been agreed upon and was this important. The GVN should not have any problems with the Media Statement which contained nothing remotely controversial.

Iran and Burma

¶6. (C) The Ambassador expressed concern over reports in the New York Times and elsewhere indicating that Iran was pulling back from the commitment it made in Vienna to send uranium to Russia for reprocessing. If true, there will be a need for strong, unified action at the UN Security Council. He also urged Vietnam to work closely with the United States and others to ensure that Burma's 2010 elections were free and fair, something that would be extremely difficult if Aung San Suu Kyi were unable to participate meaningfully. Minh voiced surprise and disappointment at Tehran's decision to repudiate the agreement its negotiators had made in Vienna, saying that things had looked hopeful. On Burma, Minh

claimed not to have much information about the recent visit of that country's third-ranking general, Thura Shwe Mann, but sought to characterize the trip as a sign that Burma was more willing to listen to Vietnam's suggestions on how to open up to the world (ref. D). (Note: We understand that Vietnam's Ministry of Defense took the lead in organizing the visit, which was long-scheduled. VFM Minh did not elaborate further what suggestions Vietnam may have offered Burma. End note.) He said that he understood the need for elections to be seen as credible, and, laughing, said that it could be a real headache for Vietnam if Burma's elections coincided with the ASEAN summit.

Staffing

17. (C) Reminded that DPM/FM Pham Gia Khiem had assured the Secretary during their meeting in Washington, DC in early October that Mission staffing "would not be a problem," Minh promised to continue to press the Vietnamese interagency to have Embassy Hanoi and ConGen HCMC's outstanding position requests approved. He noted that the Embassy received approval for one position (in which the Ministry of Public Security had a special interest) on October 30, adding that he was optimistic more would come through. At the same time, Minh fell back on the well-worn arguments about the need for inter-ministerial clearance.

Visa for former high-ranking MFA official

18. (C) For the most part, Minh appeared content to respond to the Ambassador's agenda. The one issue that Minh stressed, strongly,

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was the outstanding visa request for Minh's previous boss, former MFA International Organizations Director General Ngac Pham. Minh said that many in the Central Committee were upset that Pham, a distinguished former diplomat who had traveled to the United States several times in the past, was not able to obtain a visa, and that he did not understand what was the obstacle. ACTION REQUEST: Pham has a "00" Category 1 name-check hit. Our understanding is that CA/VO/L/C has received the information it required from the clearing agency, but the case is still pending in the system. We request that CA move to resolve the issue, which has been raised several times and is becoming an unnecessary irritant in the overall relationship.
Palmer